

PRESTIGE

In Appreciation Of The Very Best In Life

JANUARY 2005

THE CULTURE DIVA

ANA WANG

ENERGY SAVER BY
DESIGN

JOHN KIRKHAM

FESTIVE JOY!

**CHINESE
NEW YEAR**

SUPPLEMENT

LEGALLY DIFFERENT

**SEAN
FRANCOIS
LA'BROOY**



HOLLYWOOD

S MILE

In recent years, dentistry has changed a great deal. Dr Rex Tan tells **Floyd Cowan** how he has led the way in Singapore by introducing many firsts for his profession.

You have admired and envied the smiles of Hollywood stars. They can be cheeky and charming or devastatingly dazzling. What they all have in common, however, are two rows of evenly sized, gleaming white teeth. Fine for them, you think, but you do not have the time to go for endless sessions in the dentist's chair. Furthermore, you do not want to endure braces and all the effort it takes to get that perfect smile. You might even be a little bit afraid of visiting the dentist because you remember the pain.

Times have changed. One dentist that has helped move the profession into the 21st century is Dr Ernest Rex Tan director of Smile inc. Dr Tan attended the National University of Singapore where he achieved his degree in dentistry. Then, he went to London where he obtained a masters degree in restorative dentistry at Eastman Dental Institute. In 1996, he returned to Singapore to set up Smile inc.

Dr Tan began changing the way that dentistry had been done in the city right from the start, with new innovations and new technology. He went beyond the minimum required by medical standards to provide his patients with the highest level care while still keeping the costs in line. His hygienic standards were

so high that during the SARS crisis he may have been the only dentist in the city to see an increase in patients as many people were afraid to get treatment because of their concern about contracting the disease.

Before many people were familiar with computers he set up an office that was thoroughly computerised. "We computerised from the front end to the back so that every possible part of the business that could be computerised was."

Dr Tan's patients may not have noticed this, but what they did notice was the distinctly different approach he took to his office design. He did such a good job of getting away from the old image of dentistry that trendy magazines have featured Smile inc.'s Suntec City office. "People have told us our clinic looks more like a modelling agency than a dentist office," he says. "I didn't want people to fear going to the dentist, so we have done everything we can to make them feel comfortable and at ease. We even have television sets on the ceiling so that when they are reclining in the chair they can watch it, relax and take their mind off their treatment."

These moves are really cosmetic in comparison to other changes Dr Tan has brought to dentistry in Singapore. "When I opened Smile inc. I decided that I wanted a new and modern practice that was

"PEOPLE BELIEVED THAT THEY HAD TO GO TO PLACES LIKE NEW YORK TO GET A HOLLYWOOD SMILE, BUT THEY DON'T HAVE TO. IT CAN BE DONE RIGHT HERE IN SINGAPORE"

“WE ALWAYS TRY TO GIVE THE ABSOLUTE BEST TO OUR PATIENTS WITHOUT CHARGING THEM A LOT MORE THAN THEY WOULD NORMALLY PAY FOR TREATMENT”



distinct in many aspects from other dentists. When I heard that there was a laser machine that could whiten teeth without bleaching, I decided I wanted to investigate it. I went to Utah and saw the technology in action and I was very impressed. When you bleach teeth to whiten them it takes several weeks and it is an involved process. The laser treatment resulted in dramatic change and you could see a significant improvement in just one visit. I realised the importance of this — it was the killer application for dentistry. I bought a machine for my office in Singapore and I obtained the rights for distribution in Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, the Philippines, and Vietnam. I was the first dentist to use this in Asia.”

One hour and half session will clean years of built up stains and discoloration. “Only the teeth are exposed, so there is no damage to soft tissue. It is a controlled environment and it is very easy, unlike the old ways of cleaning teeth which can be very uncomfortable.”

When Dr Tan decided it was time to expand, he contacted the manufacturers in the US to buy more equipment but found they were no longer making laser machines. “They had to make a business decision because the laser equipment was very expensive so they decided to use arc light technology instead. It is more affordable for both the dentists and the patients, but the results are not as good as laser treatment. People have had to return for improvement sessions soon after they have had the initial treatment,” he explains. “I’ve done more than 1000 laser treatments and have always had excellent results.”

The cost of laser treatment depends on the initial condition of your teeth and the extent of the work to be done. How long it lasts will depend on your lifestyle and if you practice good oral hygiene. “People who are heavy smokers, drink a lot of coffee and do not take good care of their teeth will require a longer session to begin with and if they continue that lifestyle then they will need treatment sooner than someone who takes good care of their teeth. Some people come in just for a touch up if they are going to a social event and want to look good for it.”

The other significant development that Dr Tan provides his patients is to improve their smile, despite severe dental problems, in just two sessions. New materials, new techniques and a new approach result in stunning improvements in just two sessions. Dr Tan went through a series of slides that showed teeth that were discoloured, broken, in-turned or out-turned in the first picture and transformed into a beautiful smile with even gleaming white teeth in the second picture.

“We take a holistic approach to recreating the smile,” he explains of the complete dental makeover that he can do for his patients. “People have come here who are afraid to smile. They look down so you can’t see their teeth and we transform their looks so much that it not only changes their teeth but their whole face. See the difference with this one lady, in the second picture her whole face looks much better. She has gotten rid of her glasses and she is obviously much happier and has more confidence in her looks and in herself.”

So good are the result that expats who have left Singapore will return to the city just to see him when they need more treatments. Dr Tan is looking for new ways to improve his practice. By bringing new skills to his operation, they are sure to be as appreciated as the ones he has already implemented. ☐